

COVID-19 & Flu Vaccination Programmes

The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme¹

Why vaccinations?

Vaccines help people survive. Vaccines save 5 lives every minute. The eradication of smallpox—a serious disease that left even survivors scarred for life—alone saves an estimated 5 million lives every year. If a vaccine had not eradicated smallpox, someone would now die from the disease every 6 seconds of every day. Prior to the introduction of a vaccine, as recently as 1980, measles caused more than 2.6 million deaths globally.

Vaccines can only save lives if people are vaccinated. Fortunately, most people get vaccinated. For example, 85% of children worldwide are vaccinated against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough), and in 125 countries that figure exceeds 90%. The vast majority of people in most countries vaccinate their children, thereby making an important contribution to public health and people's lives.

Why COVID-19 vaccinations?

COVID-19 is a serious disease. In only 10 months the SARS-CoV-2 virus infected over 78 million people across the world, killing 1.7 million. COVID-19 patients require intensive care in hospital at a rate more than 6 times greater than during the influenza pandemic in 2009. Many survivors are faced with sometimes severe long-term health impacts.

While behavioural measures such as isolating while symptomatic, mask-wearing, and physical distancing have slowed the spread of the virus, vaccines provide a better path out of the COVID-19 pandemic, and scientists have now developed several highly effective vaccines against COVID-19.

The public response so far

Studies in several countries have shown that most of the public recognize the importance of the COVID-19 vaccine and are keen to be vaccinated. For example, in a U.K. sample of more than 5,000 respondents, 72% were willing to be vaccinated in October 2020. In Finland, up to 75% of respondents were willing to

¹ Most of the contents of this booklet, including all facts and figures, are sourced from 'The Covid-19 Vaccine Communication Handbook', which was produced by a team of scientific experts from all over the world. This unique online guide was published in January 2021 by the University of Bristol. As of October 2021, it can be accessed here: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2021/january/covid-19-vaccine-communication-handbook.html>

be vaccinated. In Australia, the rate was 86% and similarly high levels have been found in Malaysia. In the United States the rate was 66% in a national sample of 19,058 respondents in August 2020.

Facts surrounding COVID-19 and the vaccination programme

- There is negligible risk of any vaccine giving you the disease—and in the case of COVID-19, none of the vaccines currently being rolled out use the live virus at all, not even in a weakened form.
- Even though COVID-19 vaccine development was accelerated, vaccine testing was still required to proceed through a rigorous series of steps to establish the vaccines' safety and efficacy. The vaccines' safety will continue to be closely monitored as they are rolled out, to ensure they don't have serious side effects at unacceptable rates.
- mRNA vaccines are synthetic and do not contain a weakened form of the actual virus. Instead, mRNA vaccines deliver instructions that allow your body to make a protective response. This is just as unlikely to change your genome as eating fish will make you grow gills.
- Because of the risk from COVID-19 and its prevalence, the trials have proceeded faster than has been possible with other vaccines. Many tens of thousands of people signed up rapidly to participate in vaccine trials, compared to the more usual year or 18 months it takes to recruit a fraction of that for other vaccines.
- The COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective but transient side effects such as headaches, pain at the injection site, or fatigue have been reported by a significant number of people.
- COVID-19 is a highly infectious and deadly disease. By the end of 2020, it had caused over 1.7 million deaths globally.
- Our understanding of COVID-19 is based on scientific research conducted by teams all over the world, as well as practical experience by the entire global medical community.
- It is true that COVID-19 is more deadly in older people and those with underlying health problems. However, COVID-19 has caused many additional deaths beyond what would normally be expected in an average year.

COVID-19 booster vaccination²

- People aged 50 years and over, health and social care workers and younger people at risk are being offered a single booster dose of coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine. The NHS will contact you when it is your turn to have a booster.
- Like some other vaccines, levels of protection may begin to wane over time. A booster dose will help extend the protection you gained from your first 2 doses and give you longer term protection. The booster will help to reduce the risk of you needing admission to hospital due to COVID-19 infection this winter.
- The booster is being offered at least 6 months after your last dose. Like your previous doses, the vaccine will be given in your upper arm.
- You will be given a booster dose of either Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. These vaccines have already been given to millions of people in the UK. You will be offered the right vaccine for you which may be the same or different from the vaccines that you had before.
- There are very few people who should not have a booster. If you have had a severe reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine you should discuss this with your doctor. For potential side effects of the COVID-19 booster, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-booster-dose-resources/covid-19-vaccination-a-guide-to-booster-vaccination>.
- The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of you suffering from COVID-19. It may take a few days for your body to build up some protection from the booster. Like all medicines, no vaccine is completely effective – some people may still get COVID-19 despite having a vaccination, but this should be less severe.

Flu vaccination winter 2021-2022³

- The flu vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine. It's offered every year on the NHS to help protect people at risk of getting seriously ill from flu.
- Flu vaccination is doubly important this winter because:

² The information in this section has been adapted from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-booster-dose-resources/covid-19-vaccination-a-guide-to-booster-vaccination>.

³ The information in this section has been adapted from <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/>.

- more people are likely to get flu this winter as fewer people will have built up natural immunity to it during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- if you get flu and COVID-19 at the same time, research shows you're more likely to be seriously ill;
- getting vaccinated against flu and COVID-19 will provide protection for you and those around you for both these serious illnesses.
- If you've had COVID-19, it's safe to have the flu vaccine. It will still be effective at helping to prevent flu. If you are offered both vaccines, it's safe to have them at the same time.
- For more information, including on eligibility and where to have the flu vaccine, as well as its effectiveness and potential side effects, see <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/>.

Getting more help and advice

If you have any questions surrounding these vaccines, but aren't sure where to turn, please contact the Oxfordshire Mind Information Service on 01865 247 788, or info@oxfordshiremind.org.uk. You can text us on 07451 277 973. You might also consider taking a look at some of the resources below.

Useful links & resources:

- Question and answer sheet (regarding the COVID-19 vaccine): <https://www.norfolkandwaveneyccg.nhs.uk/publications/documents/224-covid-19-vaccination-mythbuster/file>
- Information around online information and the coronavirus vaccine: <https://dcmsblog.uk/check-before-you-share-toolkit/>
- Reassurances on the COVID-19 vaccine: <https://www.swlstg.nhs.uk/news-and-events/latest-news/item/vaccine-safety-and-myths-busting>
- NHS Myth busing video around the vaccine.
- GOV.UK COVID advice: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>.
- Oxfordshire Mind's factsheet on coronavirus and your mental health, available here: <https://www.oxfordshiremind.org.uk/support-for-you/resources/>.
- Information on the government's COVID-19 vaccine programme: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>.
- Booking a COVID-19 vaccination: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>.

- COVID-19 booster vaccine: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-booster-dose-resources/covid-19-vaccination-a-guide-to-booster-vaccination>.
- Flu vaccine: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/>.